

February 25-27, 2015

Herrenhausen Conference

Herrenhausen Palace, Hanover, Germany

CONFERENCE REPORT

“Transmedia Storytelling and Its Reception: Economies and Politics of Participation”

International Conference

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PD Dr. Lucia Krämer (Leibniz University of Hanover),
supported by the Volkswagen Foundation**

Report:

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Introduction

Stories travel across multiple media platforms, media corporations cash in on transmedia events and users participate in the production processes of media franchises via fan engagement. Be it bestseller TV series (e.g. *Game of Thrones*), web entertainments (e.g. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*), transmedia theatre projects (e.g. *The Memory Dealer*), cross-medial adaptations of games (e.g. *Go*) or secret cinema events, the interconnectivity through digital media and social networks allows for an ever-growing fascination and thus great diversity in transmedia productions. Therefore, researchers and practitioners alike invest greatly in studying the narrative, structural and technological features of transmedia storytelling in order to understand its potentials as well as challenges. Audience engagement and immersion are central to a transmedia experience. Thus, questions arise such as how to motivate audience participation. What are economic, political and artistic implications of transmedia storytelling?

The international conference *Transmedia Storytelling and Its Reception: Economies and Politics of Participation*, (25th - 27th February 2015) organised by PD Dr. Lucia Krämer and PD Dr. Monika Pietrzak-Franger, offered insights into a wide range of perspectives on the theory and practice of transmedia storytelling. Theoretical issues were related to a great variety of (medial) examples as well as institutional and technical contexts, resulting in a wide overview of the topic, inspiring debates and projects.

The symposium was generously funded by the Volkswagen Foundation and hosted at Schloss Herrenhausen in Hanover. It was subdivided into five sections, ranging from economic to narratological questions and from production to reception oriented perspectives (I: Transmedia Storytelling and Its Economies, II: Transmedia and World-Building, III: Transmedia and Seriality, IV: Transmedia Literacy, and V: Transmedia Storytelling and Participatory Culture). Three keynote lectures enriched the debates with narratological, participatory and psychological perspectives of transmedia storytelling.

Papers and Panels¹

Monika Pietrzak-Franger (University of Hamburg) offered an in-depth **introduction** to the conference. The idea of the conference grew, according to Pietrzak-Franger, out of two lines of thought: 1) the dissatisfaction with “the seemingly limitless terminological inclusivity” of concepts like transmedia storytelling, franchising and transmedia story worlds, and 2) an interest in “types, forms but also limits of audience engagement in a rapidly changing media landscape.” It was the specific intention of the convenors to aim for a highly interdisciplinary discussion, bringing together a wide variety of perspectives and uniting the voices of researchers and practitioners. Pietrzak-Franger summarised the two-fold aim of the conference as enhancing the “terminological and typological discussions” of transmedial storytelling on the one hand and pursuing the “modes, demands but also limits” of audience engagement on the other, by also focussing on the “practical, economic and political dimensions” of participatory culture. The introduction closed with a series of questions related to issues like “the strategies of participation” and “audience literacy” in the context of transmedia storytelling but also the analysis and theorisation of the rhetoric connected to transmedia storytelling and audience participation.

¹ All of the quotations above are citations from the respective oral presentations of the papers.

The **first keynote lecture** was given by **Prof. Dr. Irina Rajewsky** (FU Berlin), an expert on intermediality studies and transmedial narratology. It was entitled **“Transmedia Storytelling and Transmedial Narratology: Defining the Fields.”** The aim of her paper was the “theorisation and specification of transmedia storytelling in relation to neighbouring concepts such as adaptation, intermediality, transmediality”, and, more specifically, the differentiation between the terms ‘transmedia’, ‘transmedial’ and ‘transmediality’. As became apparent in her talk, ‘transmediality’ as a concept is crucial in diverse and also divergent research traditions: the German-language based intermediality debate, the transmedial narratology debate (a more recent development in the context of postclassical narratology) and the Anglo-American transmedia storytelling debate.

In order to show the characteristics and benefits of working with ‘transmediality’ in the context of transmedial narratology and thus its relevance for research in transmedia storytelling, Rajewsky took three argumentative steps: 1) she contextualised ‘transmediality’ in the German intermediality debate, 2) she described the field of transmedial narratology and the way it uses the term ‘transmediality’, and 3) she characterised the performative potential of a transmedial research perspective and the “double logic of transmedial phenomena” as combining medium-specificity and transmediality. This, in turn, brought the viewer’s perspective into the focus of analysis.

The discussion that followed Rajewsky’s presentation concentrated on the aspects of a) ‘travelling concepts’ (Mieke Bal) and immersion, b) participation as well as c) the theorisation of the double logic of transmedial phenomena. This added focus on the viewer’s perspective and the fusion of theory and practice is what followed in the upcoming papers.

Section I was entitled **“Transmedia Storytelling and Its Economics.”** Prof. Dr. Rüdiger Heinze (TU Braunschweig) introduced the panel comprising Belén Santa-Ollala (Senior Creative Consultant at Transmedia Storyteller Ltd.) and Johannes Fehrle, M.A. (University of Mannheim), thus bringing together digital practice and academic theory. Both papers shed light on various ways of creating transmedia story worlds, on effects of audience engagement and on economic parameters of franchise marketing.

Belén Santa-Ollala’s presentation on **“Transmedia and Engagement: Conducttr, Interactive Multiplatform Storytelling Tool: Case Studies in Marketing, Entertainment and Education”** gave insight into the design and the various possibilities of the “drag-and-

drop storytelling & gaming platform” Conducttr, provided by Transmedia Storyteller. Through consultancy and project development, Transmedia Storyteller helps creators devise and orchestrate complex transmedia experiences that involve various multimedia platforms of audience engagement, including Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Thus, the paper revealed and discussed stages of development, opportunities and problems of audience engagement as well as diverse levels and features of participation. The parameters discussed by Santa-Ollala that enable audience engagement included “strategies of audience building, user content generation, role-playing dynamics, gamification and team participation.” Santa-Ollala illustrated the wide-ranging possibilities of transmedia world building via three examples, taken from three different fields: entertainment, marketing, and education. The project *19 Reinos*, which accompanied the fourth season of *Game of Thrones*, was a virtual battle for the Iron Throne on the web, Facebook and Twitter; it blurred fiction and reality through a real-life crowning of the winner. The example for marketing, the *Chatsfield Hotel*, engages audiences in stories and characters of upper-class life style and scandal – again through various forms of immersion. As the third example showed, transmedia story worlds are also used for educational purposes for such projects as crisis simulation.

The discussions that followed the paper centred on ethical questions, such as the manipulative purposes and economical functionalisation of transmedia storytelling products. Another issue that was addressed was the comparison between the time-consuming production/reception process on the one hand and the small number of users who actually engage in the entire transmedia world of a project on the other.

Johannes Fehrle’s paper on “Transmedia Adaptation: Between Storytelling and Brand Management” focussed on what Gérard Genette termed “paratexts.” Fehrle interpreted paratexts (both peri- and epitexts) in the context of transmedial adaptation as “sites in which issues of authority and control over a fictional brand are most visibly played out.” He assigned paratexts a “crucial role in franchising networks” because they “manage the symbolic capital of sometimes competing, sometimes collaborating brands.” The paper then illustrated various functions of paratexts in brand marketing via the media franchise of HBO’s *Game of Thrones*, concentrating on the hypotexts, the books. As an example for peritexts, Fehrle focussed on their repackaging and changing cover designs in the context of the transmedia convergence of the TV series. As examples of epitexts, he discussed the “performative display” of fan-based negotiation of authorship and authority via the Comicon panels with George Martin and fan interventions on social media platforms.

Both papers of the panel had a strong focus on the economic side of transmedia production, both illustrated the great variety of ways in which stories can grow into larger metatexts across media, and both included aspects of authority on the side of production and reception. Yet, while Santa-Ollala's paper seemed to concentrate on the core elements of large scale transmedia projects, Fehrle's talk narrowed in on seemingly marginal aspects, such as peri- and epitexts, thus rendering such features as cover designs and fan interviews a much more central and authoritative status in the making and controlling of transmedia story worlds. Despite their different focal points, both papers shared their stress on corporate marketing and production. And both papers created an awareness of the great number of parameters to be taken into account in transmedia storytelling, which in turn further terminological and conceptual discussion.

Section II, "Transmedia and World-Building," chaired by Prof. Dr. Rainer Emig (Leibniz University Hanover), included papers by Prof. Dr. Joyce Goggin (Amsterdam University) and Prof. Dr. Mark J. P. Wolf (Concordia University Wisconsin). Both Goggin and Wolf addressed successional and simultaneous strategies of world building in transmedia franchises, shedding light on how readers participate in building, structuring and coping with complex story worlds as well as how the stories blend with real life experiences.

Joyce Goggin in her paper **"From Text to Film, to Tourist Destination: Spreadable *Eat, Pray, Love*"** read Elizabeth Gilbert's autobiographical novel as "inherently transmedial." According to Goggin, this is due to its blending of stories from various genres and its projection onto diverse medial platforms. In addition, the novel was adapted into film and resulted, in a further form of media convergence, even in themed tourist destinations and souvenir spin-off products. Goggin discussed how space and national identity were de-functionalised by representations that over-romanticise and fictionalise real-life destinations, such as Italy, India and Indonesia. In relating the narrative to a long tradition of self-help guides from Benjamin Franklin to Claude Bristol, "all of which predicated an equation of happiness with capital," Goggin pointed to the capitalist aims of medial and real-life tourism effected by this transmedia franchise, inviting numberless spin-offs, product tie-ins and theme-based tourist attractions. The reading of travel destinations as mediascapes in the context of convergence culture, as also discussed after the paper, addressed yet again the necessity of distinguishing and clearly defining the notions of adaptation and transmedia storytelling. The expansion of story worlds and the issue of coping with an abundance of (medial) information connected Goggin's paper to the subsequent presentation.

In his paper **“The Importance of Overflow and Chunking in World-Building and the Experiencing of Imaginary Worlds,”** Mark J. P. Wolf suggested a conscious use of ‘overflow’ of information as a way to attract audiences to participate in transmedia world building. He started his argument by describing the four stages in which audiences experience large amounts of world data in (transmedial) story worlds (“immersion, absorption, saturation, overflow”), drawing on his seminal study on *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (2012). The main device to keep the attention of an audience across media is by structuring overflowing amounts of data through “chunking”, a term he referred to as deriving from psychology and as describing the process by which “things are grouped together conceptually to become more manageable in one’s mind.” Wolf enumerated several supportive strategies to aid chunking, such as its early indication, the connection of large amounts of information to known data or their “delivery speed.” Wolf stressed the crucial importance of overflow and chunking for the design and experiencing of complex story worlds, especially in transmedia franchises. The discussion following the presentation aimed at terminological and conceptual specification, including the comparison of terms like ‘mapping’ vs. ‘world data’ and ‘fictional worlds’ vs. ‘story worlds’.

Section III, “Transmedia and Seriality,” chaired by Dr. Kathleen Loock (John F. Kennedy Institute, FU Berlin), combined the papers by Maria Sulimma, M.A. (John F. Kennedy Institute, FU Berlin) and PD Dr. Thomas Klein (University of Hamburg). The focus of this panel lay on questions of seriality exemplified by case studies of texts such as *The Walking Dead* or *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*. It investigated adaptation and convergence strategies across media as well as the effect and challenges of the discussed serialising practices.

Maria Sulimma’s paper **“Negotiating Serial Flow: *The Walking Dead* as Transmedia Phenomenon”** examined the series as “an example of crossmedia franchising” and studied “the ways audiences and production strategies respond to the challenges of connecting different simultaneously progressing narratives.” Sulimma analysed narrative as well as medial strategies of producers who need to satisfy both newcomers and returning audiences of the respective ‘texts’. According to her, transmedia storytelling with all its vagueness and blurriness “represents a change in the way that people watch, read, play, connect, and respond to storytelling.” The agent of these complex processes of negotiation is no longer just the producer. Sulimma used the comic book series, the television series, and the video game of *The Walking Dead* to show how “producers and the audience have to negotiate the serial flow, [which is] the essential motor of transmedia storytelling.”

Thomas Klein's paper "Web Seriality and the Concept of Transmedia Storytelling: Challenges and Difficulties," drew the attention to digital serialisation and transmedia storytelling in web series. For this, Klein took a classificatory approach and enumerated several criteria to categorize web series, such as the distinction between hypermediacy and immediacy (Bolter/Grusin), the illusion of authenticity, the amount of participation and the possibility of feedback. He also differentiated between commercial series (such as *Nurse Jeffrey: Bitch Tapes* as a spin-off of the TV series *House*) and independent web series (such as *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*). Similar to Jenkins, Klein drew a close connection between transmedia storytelling and seriality. Yet, he stressed the limited number of ways in which the audience could actively participate in creating and/or influencing content for web series. He even questioned whether "chats on Facebook and Twitter" qualified at all as audience participation in terms of transmedia storytelling and pointed to the complex multimedial nature of the Internet itself as needing further discussion. Thus, Klein's paper added further aspects to the study of transmedia storytelling as a practice: the problematizing of the functions and effects of seriality, the questioning of what can be accounted as audience participation and discussion of how to deal with multi-modal media differentiation.

As part of the evening programme, the participants of the conference were then treated to a walking tour around the Herrenhausen Gardens, where lively discussion followed a day of inspiring papers.

The evening closed with an **open lecture** by **Prof. Dr. Eckart Voigts** (TU Braunschweig), introduced by Dr. Katja Ebeling (Volkswagen Stiftung) and entitled **"William Shakespeare schreibt Star Wars®, Lance Armstrong singt Radiohead: Remix und Parodie in der digitalen Alltagskultur"** ("William Shakespeare writes Star Wars®, Lance Armstrong sings Radiohead: Remix and Parody in Digital Everyday Culture"; translation MMF). Voigts' paper, presented in German to the general public and the participants of the conference, offered an array of theoretical contemplations on and humorous examples of mash-up culture present on a wide range of media.

Voigts emphasized a shift of paradigm in digital reception: Digital participatory culture implies a "user who wishes to actively engage in creative production and therefore desires to do something with a text in order to 'perform' on the internet." This form of participatory engagement is present in mash-up culture and involves, according to Voigts, constant

processes of adaptation and appropriation of texts and of media protocols, which in turn help material to travel across media platforms through media convergence and transmedia storytelling. Voigts characterised digital mashups and remixes as thriving, viral and subversive cultural practices, which enable audiences to create bottom-up responses to mainstream media activity by recombining, collaging, montaging and thus re-creating clips of existing media footage. Matthijs Vlot's supercut mash-up "Creep" (2013), which remixes Oprah Winfrey's Lance Armstrong interview with the Radiohead song, served as an example to illustrate many of the empowering features of digital mash-up culture.

The paper not only highlighted theoretical and cultural issues connected to the practices of mashing and remixing, it also demonstrated the great variety of these practices as well as their central function as illustrators of media change. The various forms of audience engagement ranged from digital parodies to 'literal videos' (e.g. David A. Scott's "Total Eclipse of the Heart", 2009) and from content chains ("The Rubble Bucket challenge" and the "10 Hour Walking" series) to fictional Facebook projects (Shakespeare Facebook Profile). The lecture closed with an outlook on literary remixes, such as Seth Grahame-Smith's mashup novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* and Ian Doescher's "pastiche mashup" *William Shakespeare's Star Wars*®, which opened up discussions on the interrelatedness of cultural/media development and copyright issues.

Voigts' keynote lecture added to the conference by bringing participatory culture, audience authority and media change into even stronger focus of the discussion on transmedia storytelling. While Klein's paper problematized the limitedness of audience engagement in bottom down web series, Voigt's wide ranging examples of bottom up creativity rather emphasised the great variety of strategies and formats, at the same time revealing conventionalised protocols and restrictions of participatory culture.

The third day opened with **Section IV**, entitled “**Transmedia Literacy**” and chaired by Prof. Dr. Joyce Goggin. The papers presented by Dr. Regina Schober (University of Mannheim) and Dr. Elizabeth Evans (University of Nottingham) narrowed in on the generation of knowledge in a context of adaptational creativity and transmedia storytelling. By giving an overview of her research on interactive cinema strategies and audience engagement in immersive cinema events, Dr. Sarah Atkinson (King’s College London) added the aspect of immersion to the discussion of participatory practices and transmedia world building. In all three papers, a clear focus was laid on the reception process and literacy in the context of a changed media environment.

Regina Schober in her paper “**Adaptation and Cultural Functions: What We can Learn from Pragmatism**” used the Chinese Board Game Go as both an example of and a metaphor for transmedia storytelling, thus illustrating and discussing “the unfolding of narrative”, the complexity of adaptational creativity and the generation of knowledge. For this, she related transmedia storytelling, adaptation and its reception to the thinking of early twentieth-century American Pragmatism. Schober suggested to “look at adaptation through a Pragmatist lens” and as a result to connect a “processual notion of truth” and a concept of culture as “interlocking networks of adaptation” to the study of transmedia storytelling. Drawing on Charles Darwin’s central role in the thinking of American Pragmatism (of James, Dewey, Rorty), Schober claimed that the biological concept of adaptation is advantageous to describing the processes of creation and reception of adaptation and transmedia storytelling. Through a combination of Pragmatist thinking and the biological concept of adaptation, questions of fidelity are, according to Schober, overcome while a connection to some vague notion of an/the original is retained. Schober advocated “flexibility in ways of engaging with adaptations.” “By developing an understanding for the complexities and contingencies of adaptations, we become empowered to enjoy the creativity involved in decentralised systems.” In applying American Pragmatist thinking to the analysis of adaptation and transmedia storytelling, process and processual knowledge are emphasised. By linking adaptation and transmedia storytelling to the Game Go and by presenting a number of examples taken from literature, film and comics (Manga) that adapt the game or create intermedial references to it, Schober also reflected on general notions of transmedia storytelling: She connected processes of knowledge acquisition to world building strategies in transmedia story worlds and thus revealed “explicit and implicit rules behind the games of signification.” Thus, on the one hand, the paper furthered the theoretical and philosophical discussions on adaptation as well as its function in transmedia storytelling, and via that also

added thoughts to their respective, interrelated research fields. On the other, it also highlighted the changing nature of narratives as they travel through media as well as their historical and cultural contexts.

Elizabeth Evans, in her paper **“It’s probably just me: The Literacies of Pervasive Sound Narratives,”** presented the transmedial play *The Memory Dealer*, created by Rik Lander, as part of a research project examining the “potential of transmedia drama experiences” and “the multiple literacies at stake in such transmedia, multimodal drama.” The paper discussed issues of media literacy revealed by *The Memory Dealer*, i.e. issues examined in the context of an experimental and pervasive transmedia drama for an adult and otherwise media literate audience. The play involves the use of websites, audio plays, performative interactions and installations, with the (unusual) use of media occurring in unexpected situations and spaces (such as audio information being drawn from a pillow). Also, participants needed to visit real-life locations and oscillate between their roles as viewers and performative agents, being assigned shifting roles “from listener to viewer to reader to performer.” They were asked to tune into an inner voice via an audio play, interact with characters from the story, retrieve information from installations in a car or hotel room and finally team up with other participants to decide on the outcome of the story. According to Evans, *The Memory Dealer* creates difficulties for the viewers/performers because it uses media in unfamiliar ways, blurs fictional and factual spaces and is “transmedial and pervasive.” Not only were the participants forced to perform in unexpected situations, like speaking up at a fake dentist’s office, but technology and media usage were altered, for example when the answer button on the distributed mobile phones suddenly served a different function. This drama, which deals and deliberately plays with confusion, uses the media illiteracy of its audience to doubly create and enhance an atmosphere of uncertainty. From this, Evans in her paper derived a distinction between different kinds of media literacy, namely narrative and logistical literacy, the latter of which she further subdivided into technological and geographical literacy. It was the aim of the research project to study the ways in which “otherwise ‘literate’ audience members learn new narrative techniques.” As a result, Evans suggested a reconsideration of media literacy as “an ongoing process” and stressed its cognitive and creative use in pervasive drama.

Evan’s paper not only connected the practitioner’s perspective to an academic account on transmedia storytelling and its reception. In doing so, the project added an empirical focus to questions of world building, media literacy and audience participation. Furthermore, it also showed the synergetic potential in general of combining performing arts and academic

research in the study of transmedia storytelling and its reception. Via transmedial drama, such as *The Memory Dealer*, the paper illustrated various ways of creating transmedia story worlds as well as further creative and innovative strategies of investigating audience participation.

By summarising her recent research, **Sarah Atkinson** talked about transmedia storytelling and its reception from the perspective of audience and production studies. The topics introduced ranged from interactive cinema strategies and audience engagement in immersive cinema events to questions of archiving transmedia story productions. As her past work, she introduced her PhD project *An Interactive Film Demonstration: Crossed Lines* (2009), which investigated “new paradigms of interactive cinema” through a “fictional interactive AV piece” allowing for audience engagement via “a multi-screen viewing environment” as well as an “interactive interface and story navigation form.” Her recent book *Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences* (2014) as well as further studies explored audience engagement in Secret Cinema Events, such as *Shawshank Redemption* (2012) and *Back to the Future* (2014) projects, observing a “massification of cinema experience” through transmedia storytelling strategies. These studies investigated cinema events, which invite the audience to dress up and physically engage in a film’s universe which is set up for the viewers as real-life entertainment parks, before the actual viewing of the cult film starts. Through these project descriptions, Atkinson added further aspects to the question of authority in audience participation and immersion, helped expand the wide spectrum of world building strategies in transmedia storytelling, also in connection to thoughts on urban and virtual space.

In describing her more recent work, she turned to production studies and introduced the *Deep Film Access Project* (funded by the AHRC) as well as a Transmedia Database Project, the former designing a platform to create what she calls an “ontology” of digital film production, the latter researching and creating ways to archive transmedia projects, thus preserving and writing transmedia storytelling history. Both database projects opened up new parameters to think about in transmedia storytelling and its reception: By revealing all stages of digital film production on a platform and thus enabling to follow up on several stages of multimedial creation, the *Deep Film Access Project* encourages practitioners and researchers alike to witness the minute medial steps of film creation and thus also transmedia storytelling as a process. It enables retrospective reflection on the wide range of simultaneous procedures of film making from the viewpoint of travelling narratives. In order to enhance transmedia storytelling techniques and strategies, it is important to be able to view past projects. This

growing need to think about strategies of archiving transmedia storytelling is reflected upon and experimented with via The Transmedia Database Project.

Section V, entitled “**Transmedia Storytelling and Participatory Culture**,” narrowed in on the creative power and agency of audience engagement. The presentations by PD Dr. Lucia Krämer (Leibniz University Hanover) and Prof. Dr. Martin Butler (University of Oldenburg) discussed the question of a supposed empowerment in participatory culture.

In her paper “**The *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* Drama and the Principles of Fan Participation in Transmedia Storytelling**,” Lucia Krämer discussed the “relationship of fans and creators” and thus also aspects of power distribution in transmedia franchises. The paper began with contemplations on forms and principles of fan participation. Soon it became clear that “celebratory discourses on participation” are countered by the realities of lived experience: only very few fans make use of creative participation (as revealed also by Santa-Ollala), and there are far less opportunities to really participate than one might assume (see also Klein). The *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* offer a wide range of medial platforms (YouTube, Twitter, Facebook) for the audience to engage with. As Krämer pointed out, interaction is encouraged, but heavily restricted by predetermined and prewritten ‘communication’. The main part of the paper presented and discussed a controversy among fans carried out in the so-called *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* Drama. This controversy revealed a call for “separate spheres” of fans and creators, i.e. creators should be kept out of fan spaces and fan communication. Thus, Krämer drew attention to a paradoxical development: while audiences get empowered through participatory engagement, enhanced by rhetoric of agency, this call for a clear distribution of ‘performance spaces’ re-establishes “conservative notions of authorship.”

Martin Butler in his paper “**The Audience Strikes Back...or does it?: On Participation, Interactivity, and other Tales of Empowerment**” took the debate of audience engagement onto a meta-theoretical level. He problematised the rhetoric in and about participatory culture, both among researchers and practitioners. In examining popular and academic discourses on participation, he highlighted what he called the “rhetoric of digital folklorisation” as well as the idealisation of amateurs. *The Johnny Cash Project* served to demonstrate predetermined modes of interaction and hidden marketing strategies of a seemingly grassroots endeavour. As Butler showed, Nico Carpentier’s scholarly, seemingly objective account of audience engagement rather perpetuates the idealised rhetoric of empowerment it attempts to negate. The shredding of the Revolverheld song “Ich lass für Dich das Licht an” and the resulting counter-shredding by the band demonstrated a blurring of boundaries between the amateur

and the professional and thus a dismantling of the constructed protagonist in this narrative of empowerment. Butler called for a cautious use of terms like ‘participation’ and ‘transmedia storytelling’ and thus for more meta-methodological debates.

The conference ended with a final **keynote lecture** by **Dr. Pamela Rutledge**, director of the Media Psychology Research Center and faculty member at Fielding Graduate University. Rutledge gave a compelling talk on “Keeping the Audience Engaged: Narrative Transportation across Media.” Her paper, entitled “**Psychology of the Transmedia Trip: Multi-Platform Narrative Engagement**,” examined the role of psychology in answering the question why users are willing to trace a narrative across several media. Rutledge described how psychology can be used to increase audience engagement and demonstrated the strong influence of psychological concepts in the process of creating successful transmedia narratives.

The question Rutledge posed was what motivates audiences to pursue a transmedia narrative and, moreover, “what is the psychology that facilitates the journey?” Her thesis was that involving psychotheory in the conception of transmedia products would enhance their quality as well as increase audience engagement. Rutledge illustrated the motivational forces and the central role of psychology in transmedia storytelling by means of two multimedia web projects: *Toms Shoes* and *East Los High*. Both foster social interaction and affiliation, create rituals of participation and thus raise the value of audience engagement. According to Rutledge, sustainable engagement can be reached through considering the psychological “why” audiences engage and stick to engagement with transmedia story worlds.

By relating audience engagement to Paul D. MacLean’s Triune Brain Theory and by stressing the function of the “old” (reptilian brain) in motivating activity, Rutledge drew attention to the productive role of neuroscience and psychology for transmedia storytelling production. “Content is related back to needs and goals”, thus inviting users to “take actions and to experience transformation.” For example, the *Tom Shoes* project promises its customers to give away a pair of shoes to the needy with each sold product. The purchasers are then rewarded by the benefiting party through a real-life letter correspondence. For Rutledge, this process embeds the transaction into a narrative and satisfies the altruistic needs of the consumers, who are themselves active agents of this narrative. This in turn motivates ongoing engagement and consumerism.

Rutledge thus concluded that “psychology emphasizes the audience-centric view of the transmedia journey.” Through neuroscience, the role of instinct is highlighted in the narrative experience, revealing the basic goals and needs on which a transmedia project can be founded and through which audience engagement can be triggered. Rutledge closed with the following claim: The analysis of transmedia products leads to better results if parameters such as content, structure, technology or design are combined with psychological perspectives and findings.

Conclusion

Most intriguing about the conference was its high interdisciplinarity and the great variety of examples presented: the wide span of perspectives and approaches furthered “theorisation and specification of transmedia storytelling” as well as helped study strategies and challenges of audience immersion in great detail as well as from an array of medial angles, bringing together academic scholarship, production design and performing arts.

Thus, both focus points of the conference, i.e. terminological/typological discussions and audience engagement, were considered from multiple perspectives, bringing about both specification and diversification of terms and concepts. Terminological discussions, such as the distinction between ‘transmedia storytelling’ and ‘adaptation’ or ‘fictional world’ and ‘story world’, stressed, enhanced and problematised the interdisciplinary nature of transmedia storytelling research. Interrelating disciplines, their terms and approaches in turn helped raise new questions around the study of transmedia storytelling practices.

In many cases, the papers showed both an oscillation between and the high interconnectivity of perspectives: the side of the production and reception. Discussions about reception strategies and modes of audience engagement simultaneously furthered thoughts on transmedia production and world building; and vice versa.

The conference illustrated the importance of media platforms as well as their ongoing development for both the side of designing transmedia production as well as the archiving of existing products. Thoughts on the purposes and benefiting institutions of production platforms on the one hand (entertainment, marketing, education) and on the effects of archiving material (research, transmedia storytelling history) on the other helped further an awareness of the cultural, social and political potentials of transmedia storytelling practices.

The variety of topics, of research angles (from economic and narratological to psychological questions) and of illustrative examples showed not only an ongoing expansion of the medial web involved in transmedia storytelling and its reception. The study of diverse transmedia products also highlighted aspects like media and user interconnectivity through low-threshold social media and the blurring of the boundaries between factual and fictional experience as well as digital and analogous audience engagement.

At the end of the conference, questions such as how to build multimedia platforms that allow a maximum of immersion or transmedia narratives that enable both sporadic and long-term audience engagement proved to be highly complex. This is not only due to the wide web of media involved but also to the growing number of research angles taken and questions asked. The inclusion of an economic perspective soon led to ethical debates, contrasting manipulation with a marketed liberalism of web creativity. It also opened up discussions on how to assess the very small number of ‘ideal consumers’, who engage in the entire story world of a franchise, in relation to the amount of work and funds needed to create a multi-platform transmedia product.

The papers that focussed on issues of reception and questions concerning the potentials and challenges of audience engagement showed the diversity of issues involved, ranging from psychological parameters of audience motivation to theoretical as well as empirical findings in audience behaviour and reception strategies. The processes of gaining as well as sustaining knowledge, literacy and motivation proved to be just as important to take into consideration when studying audience engagement as technological, narratological and medial strands of transmedia storytelling as well as the interconnections of these fields.

The conference on “Transmedia Storytelling and its Reception” illustrated contemporaneous, paradoxical and synergising developments: a blurring of media boundaries and the highlighting of such, and a blending as well as distinguishing of seemingly established roles like those of producers and consumers, of professionals and amateurs, but also of cultural/social/political activism and reception conservatism. In thinking about “Economies and Politics of Participation”, the papers and discussions stressed the central role of transmedia storytelling both as an evolving cultural practice in today’s media society as well as a field of scholarship that will change the way we create, receive and engage with cultural products in a growing transmedia world.